

# Professional ethical dilemmas of nurses in terms of care palliative

( Zawodowe dylematy etyczne pielęgniarek w aspekcie opieki paliatywnej )

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**Abstract** – Introduction. The ethical dilemmas of nurses are a particularly complex problem in their professional activity. Often, a nurse is faced with situations in which she has to choose between two values that are considered equally valuable and which cannot be reconciled at the same time, so the choice becomes a dilemma. The high topicality of the subject matter prompted the authors to take up these issues.

**Aim of the study.** The aim of the paper was to present the bioethical issues that a nurse encounters in her professional work in the care of a palliative care patient.

**Selection of material.** The research was conducted in the Scopus database using the following terms: bioethics, palliative care, nurse 1999-2018. The literature found in the Google Scholar database was analyzed in terms of the highest number of citations. Such selected literature was used as a material for the preparation of this paper.

**Conclusions.** The work of a nurse in the field of long-term care is an independent work, carried out in close cooperation with a doctor. In the care of the chronically ill and disabled it is very important to cooperate with the family and other carers of the sick. In the implementation of tasks in the field of long-term care, the nurse should demonstrate extremely high knowledge of changes and risks resulting from chronic diseases limiting fitness and independence, as well as knowledge of bioethics.

**Key words** - palliative medicine, nursing care, bioethical requirements.

**Streszczenie** – Wstęp. Dylematy etyczne pielęgniarek to szczególnie złożony problem w ich działalności zawodowej. Często pielęgniarka staje w sytuacjach, w których musi wybierać między dwiema wartościami, uznawanymi za równie cenne, a których nie sposób jednocześnie ze sobą pogodzić, dlatego wybór staje się dylematem. Duża aktualność tematyki skłoniła autorów do podjęcia tych zagadnień.

**Cel pracy.** Celem pracy było przedstawienie problematyki bioetycznej z którą spotyka się pielęgniarka w swej pracy zawodowej w opiece nad chorym leczonym paliatywnie.

**Dobór materiału.** Poszukiwania przeprowadzono w bazie Scopus używając pojęć: bioetyka, opieka paliatywna, pielęgniarka 1999-2018r. Znalezione piśmiennictwo w bazie Google Scholar przeanalizowano pod kątem największej liczby cytowań. Tak wyselekcjonowane piśmiennictwo posłużyło za materiał do opracowania niniejszej pracy.

**Wnioski.** Praca pielęgniarki w zakresie opieki długoterminowej jest pracą samodzielną, prowadzoną we ścisłej współpracy z lekarzem. W opiece nad osobami przewlekle chorymi i niepełnosprawnymi niezwykle istotna jest współpraca z rodziną oraz innymi opiekunami chorymi. W realizacji zadań w zakresie opieki długoterminowej pielęgniarka powinna wykazać się niezwykle dużą wiedzą w zakresie zmian oraz zagrożeń będących wynikiem przewlekłych chorób ograniczających sprawność i samodzielność a także znajomością zasad bioetycznych.

**Słowa kluczowe** - medycyna paliatywna, opieka pielęgnacyjna, wymogi bioetyczne.

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- A. The idea and the planning of the study
- B. Gathering and listing data
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## I. ETHICS OF THE PROFESSION OF NURSE

The ethics of the nurse profession is a relatively young science. It refers to the moral beliefs and internal professional conscience of people practising the profession of nurse. Social responsibility of a nurse resulting from the obligation to protect the value of health and life, required the creation of a code of professional ethics for a nurse and a midwife [1].

The Code of Professional Ethics is a set of principles that determines moral obligations related to professional activities. The principles contained in the code of professional ethics are to serve to resolve moral conflicts that can be encountered in professional work. [2]

The ethical dilemmas of nurses are a particularly complex problem in their professional activity. Often, a nurse is faced with situations in which she has to choose between two values that are considered equally valuable and which cannot be reconciled at the same time, so the choice becomes a dilemma.

The ethical problems of nurses depend on the health condition of the patient, the organisational situation of the facilities and the quality of the health services provided. In the profession of a nurse, what counts are the skills of solving them, depending on the moral sensitivity and ethical knowledge of a nurse inseparably connected with responsibility for decisions taken [1,3].

When we enter the profession, we make commitments to use knowledge in a reliable way, to enrich it constantly and to observe values and specific moral obligations. Respect for the dignity of the human person should be a primary value for the nurse. This is confirmed by the words of John Paul II, which are worth treating as a message for our profession: "Every human being has a dignity which, notwithstanding the fact that the person always exists in a concrete social and historical context, can never be placed, mutilated or destroyed, but, on the contrary, must be respected and protected (...) Yet, always and everywhere man is always man in the fullness of his human dimension.

Concern for dignity is a concern for one's own spiritual, moral and social well-being. By reconciling oneself to the dignity of another person, one reconciles oneself to the dignity of oneself. The basic objectives and values of the profession of nurse are defined by the Code of Professional

Ethics, whose provisions and interpretations provide guidelines for the behaviour associated with its implementation. Making ethical decisions towards the patient and the members of the therapeutic team obliges to know the moral principles contained in the general ethics and the code of nurse ethics. Therefore, "Becoming a nurse is not only a matter of acquiring specific skills and acquiring forms of behaviour appropriate for specific professional situations. It is also a matter of her learning the moral values of the profession in a way that will have a profound impact on her intellect, personality and lifestyle' [1].

Particularly important ethical principles in the practice of nursing should be included: The most important ethical principles in nursing practice are: goodness, independence, justice, truthfulness, ethics of care. These are the principles governing the daily practice of working with the patient. Our professional activity includes four important aspects: health promotion, disease prevention, restoring health, alleviating suffering. We do this despite the many difficulties and obstacles of daily life, fatigue, and the excessive number of patients per nurse. We must remember that we are living in a time when, between a sick person and us, super technologies are entering. The best equipment is no substitute for a smile, a handshake or a friendly conversation. What comes out of our mouths is a kind of magic word. (Rev. prof. Tischner). After all, it is the nurses who first establish contact with the patient from the moment of his arrival to the ward until his discharge. Simply being with another person, not only stands next to him, but also an authentic reception on the same waves to understand him. [4]. It is very important to establish mutual trust between the patient and the nurse.

Each nurse has her own hierarchy of values shaped by many factors, e.g. religion, culture or life experience. Patients also have their own value systems, which very often differ from ours. When making any choice related to my profession, I always try to consider not only my own point of view, but also the patient's situation. While working in a palliative care unit, sometimes I encounter ethical dilemmas on my way, sometimes it is a seemingly trivial problem, and sometimes it seems difficult, almost impossible, to make the right choice. Often, questions arise after the on-call time: Did I do the right thing? Maybe I should behave differently?

Ethics is one, there are many situations in professional and private life and in this multitude of attitudes, expectations or rights and ways of different people and social groups the basic idea of the medical profession, the profession of nurse and midwife cannot be lost; the good of a person is the most important value". [5-7].

The formation of a nurse's moral personality begins already

ady at the stage of education. Ethical models to be followed become the domain of good nursing practice in the future. Ethical behaviour is the result of an emotional and rational reaction in specific situations. There are a number of factors that influence ethical behaviour. These are the relationships, the degree of engagement. Professional ethics is the driving force behind every moral decision. [8-10].

## II. SELECTED ISSUES FROM BIOETHICS

New possibilities of medicine and biological sciences gave rise to the need to carry out moral and philosophical reflections after World War II, when mass genocide was committed. The scientific world, prompted to such reflections by events taking place during the war, established a new scientific discipline, using the achievements of philosophical sciences, which was called bioethics [1,3]. The development of this discipline took place at the beginning of the 1970s [11].

The term bioethics comes from the Greek language, in which *bios* means life. Bioethics is a part of detailed ethics. Its task is to define moral norms and evaluate human activities related to the beginning of life, its duration and its end [2, 35].

It oscillates on the verge of life in situations where it is threatened by manipulative behaviour in its nature. Man himself interferes in the naturalism of human life using highly advanced techniques.

Bioethics is by definition a philosophical science, it is in constant connection with detailed sciences in order to fulfill its role well. For this reason, bioethics is an interdisciplinary science that combines biology, medicine and ethics to protect life and its values. Today, the popularity of this discipline results from the rapid development of biomedicine, which on an increasingly large scale interferes with the nature of human life, mainly through the development of genetics [11-14].

Bioethics in its short history has been interpreted differently. It is difficult to define the concept of bioethics unequivocally. Everything depends on the degree of understanding of the concept of life.

The definition that best reflects the idea of this concept is: Bioethics - a critical study of the moral aspects of decision-making relating to human health and life and implying biological sciences [4].

The subject of bioethics is the ethical aspect of life sciences, which include biology, biochemistry and medicine, and their practical applications. Bioethics seeks to evaluate the moral actions taken to protect life and health. The ques-

tion of considering and assessing the validity of actions involving human life is extremely problematic.[13-15].

The best point of reference for human rights considerations is the law contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The human rights record first cites human dignity as the inherent privilege of every human being: the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human community is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. The creation of the Declaration of Human Rights was an expression of opposition to the crime of genocide committed against millions of people during the war. The aim was to prevent such crimes against humanity in the future [1].

Bioethics can be defined by defining its problems. Ecological bioethics (environmental ethics) refers to external factors shaping life on earth. It is a classic reaction to civilization transformations, degradation of the natural environment, disturbance of the balance of the environment and civilization diseases and genetic deformations caused by this state. For ethics, knowledge of the relationship between the environment and man is extremely important. It is important because the human species is a part of the ecosystem whose proper functioning ensures the maintenance of life on Earth. [1]

Genetic bioethics directly relates to human life and genesis. Its task is to undertake a moral reflection on the problems created by the development of modern genetics and the application of new technological advances in genetics and eugenics. Genetic engineering has the ability to interfere with the genetic code of man, both at the prenatal stage and after birth. It has the ability to recognize genes that spread hereditary diseases. Bioethics allows actions aimed at eliminating genetic defects, while opposing genetic manipulation used to select the best human traits. Bioethics determines the ethical significance of the status of a foetus and determines the moral norms of its treatment and perception.

The above-mentioned sections of bioethics concern human biogeny. Bioethics considers the problems of biotherapy, in which it considers moral reflections on medical experiments, organ transplantation, transplantation, determines the limits of mutilation (amputation, castration, sterilization). [12]

The subject of bioethics raises the issue of human death. It speaks about euthanasia, defines moral and ethical attitudes of care for terminally ill people [13,14].

### III. PROFESSIONAL PROBLEMS OF NURSES IN LONG-TERM CARE

Nursing and care facilities have opened up the possibility of developing independent, professional nursing. A long-term care nurse is obliged to supervise and coordinate nursing and care services, which guarantees high quality of patient care. The nurse must have comprehensive, comprehensive multidisciplinary knowledge [16].

The long-term care nurse is subject to serious requirements regarding professional qualifications - in particular, having the preparation of a specialist field of long-term care nursing, conservative, family, community, community and family nursing, geriatric nursing and palliative care or having completed a qualification course in the relevant field, professional experience, special predispositions and appropriate ethical attitudes.

An important role of a nurse in such facilities is to cooperate with a multidisciplinary therapeutic team providing patient care. The nurse is a direct partner of the doctor, physiotherapist, psychologist, dietician and occupational therapist. The result of work on and with the patient and his family depends on the proper, holistic activities of the whole team. A patient staying in a nursing home is a patient with complex life problems. The role of a nurse in the care of a patient is the necessity of coherence of actions from various fields of science - nursing, rehabilitation, pedagogy, psychology and social and legal.

The basic role of a nurse is to attract the patient and his family to cooperation. Educating the patient and his relatives, motivating them to satisfy their needs independently, supporting them in care activities, contribute to the patient's independence and preparing the patient and his family to return to the home environment. Another equally important role is cooperation with specialists, organizations and associations working for the benefit of a disabled patient, a chronically ill patient and their families [8,16].

The problem of an ageing population forces the need for health care services for the chronically ill and disabled. Since the mid-1990s, Poland has been witnessing rapidly developing forms of long-term care. Since then, the number of long-term care institutions has been gradually increasing. Legal regulations for the provision of long-term care have been specified in the Ordinance No. 96/2008/DSOZ of the President of the National Health Fund of 23 October 2008.

The aim of creating high-quality long-term care was to create a comprehensive unit combining nursing care with care services. The main objective of a nurse in long-term care is to determine the scope of health care provision and

to monitor the care and nursing activities.

The work of a nurse in the field of long-term care is an independent work, carried out in close cooperation with a doctor. In the care of the chronically ill and the disabled, cooperation with the family and other carers of the sick is extremely important. The nurse participates in the preparation of families and carers of patients. In the implementation of tasks in the field of long-term care, the nurse should demonstrate extremely high knowledge in the field of changes and risks resulting from chronic diseases limiting fitness and independence. [8,16]

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